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NSC BRIEFING

4 January 1961

BELGIUM

- I. Two-week-old strike stalemated.
  - A. Socialists still unable to secure general strike and leaders becoming concerned that as strike becomes more prolonged and bitter, extremists will attempt to gain control and incite strikers to greater violence.
    1. No evidence at the moment, however, that Belgium's small Communist party has played a major role in any of the strike action.
    2. Catholic unions have supported the government's controversial omnibus bill which proposes to raise taxes and cut back certain social welfare benefits.
    3. Socialist motion calling for withdrawal of omnibus bill decisively defeated in chamber on 3 January.
  - B. Prime Minister Eyskens apparently is still planning to proceed with parliamentary passage of the omnibus bill, but he has promised to return the bill with certain conciliatory amendments to committee after its debate in the chamber this week.
- II. King Baudouin playing active role in the current behind-the-scenes negotiations to find a formula to end the strikes.
  - A. One possibility is a call for new national elections this spring after the omnibus bill is approved by parliament.

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- B. Or, as the strike becomes more prolonged and outlook for a compromise agreement more remote, the only solution may be to soften parts of the program or even scrap the whole measure.
- C. Eyskens has so far given no indication he intends to back down on this issue, but may be forced to give way in order to get the economy moving again.

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